

Coalition Clean Baltic

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Assess the environmental impact of the industrial pig farms rules Helcom

Polish green groups opens up the debate on international level

Helsinki, Finland - At today's twenty-fifth meeting of the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) in Finland, Polish green groups and Coalition Clean Baltic presented a critical report on the seriously lax waste management practices in industrial pig farms situated on the Baltic coast. [1] Many of the offending farms are owned by notorious US agribusiness giant Smithfield Foods. The Commission recognised importance of the problem and sent the report to the investigative bodies to put forward to the Heads of Delegate meeting in June 2004 concrete proposals of the Helcom actions. [2]

Anna Roggenbuck, of Green Federation Gaja, explained, "In north-west Poland alone there are 40 industrial farms that produce around two million cubic metres of manure annually. In order to utilise such amounts of manure, best agricultural practice suggests that farms need to comprise 60 000 hectares of land. In our region the reality is that the farms occupy less than 15 percent of the required acreage."

Although cases of manure being disposed of in groundwater and in lakes are well-known, the Polish government appears to be turning a blind eye. Considered generally by scientists to be more of a waste product than a fertilizer, the manure from these factory farms is not dealt with suitably in sufficient acreage and monitoring is non-existent. Such practices (or lack of) are a serious threat to both the mainland and the Baltic Sea environment as well as people's health.

Dr. Andrzej Lysko, author of the report, commented, "Among the disposed of substances, the nitrogen-based substances are the most significant. Through various chemical transformations in the soil they can easily evolve into very toxic and harmful substances."

Industrial animal farming seeks out competitive advantage by shifting the costs of production onto individual farmers and the environment. Smithfield Foods, a world leader in such practices, pays only a marginal fee for its place in the Polish countryside yet at the same time leaves its own unique mark - and noises and smells. Even more serious are the impacts in neighbouring villages where the ammonia emissions from the pig farms have been rising drastically. Ammonia is responsible for the autrophysation of water and damages the neural system.

In 1999, Smithfield took over Animex Ltd, the biggest producer of pork in Poland, and initiated a vertically integrated system called "from breeding to bacon". The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), Rabobank Poland and BRE Bank subsequently granted a USD 100 000 000 loan to Animex. [3]

Robert Cyglicki, of CEE Bankwatch Network, said, "What makes this situation even more scandalous is that the EBRD loan, officially intended to develop meat processing, has helped to bring about rapid growth in industrial animal farms throughout Poland. Through public funds, therefore, small farmers disappear, food quality deteriorates and the environment is transformed. The EBRD's development and environmental mandate is as clear as an average day's output on one of our local farms."

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1) The Helsinki Commission, or HELCOM, works to protect the marine environment of the Baltic Sea from all [sources of pollution](#) through intergovernmental co-operation between Denmark, Estonia, the European Community, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia and Sweden. HELCOM is the governing body of the "Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area", also known as the [Helsinki Convention](#).

2) Report is available on the website:

http://www.bankwatch.org/issues/ebpd/animex/downloads/report_helsinki_02-04.pdf

3) The EBRD loan, according to the Bank, was granted for the modernisation of the meat industry line of Animex Ltd. Bank representatives claim that they were assured by the borrower that the money would not be used for building new industrial pig farms. However, the EBRD could not dictate precisely what the purpose of the loan should be. This means that, in the end, Smithfield was able to finance the construction of industrial farms from the EBRD's and other banks USD 100 000 000 loan. The role of the EBRD is especially important, since the Bank claims to follow an "environmental" mandate, and its participation may give the appearance that the Smithfield Foods is a reliable company with an environmental sound track record.